



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND INSURANCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 11, 2008

CONTACT: KELLY M. BROCKMAN
OR SHANNON ASHFORD
615.741.6007 (OFFICE)

Identity Theft Scam Targets Families of Recently Deceased

Nashville, TN - - Dealing with the loss of a loved one can be one of the hardest times in a person's life. It is also a time when people can become very vulnerable and scam artists are taking advantage of that.

According to the National Funeral Directors Association, reports of an identity-theft scam related to death certificates have surfaced in Indiana. Scam artists are scanning obituaries and contacting the families of the deceased. Posing as employees of the State Department of Health, the scam artists request detailed information such as the deceased's birth date, home address and social security number in order to complete a death certificate. However, the funeral director is the person who typically performs these administrative procedures as a service to the families.

These scam artists comb the obituaries, steal death certificates and even get additional personal information from genealogy web sites. Then they exploit gaps in the way deaths are reported to financial institutions to open new credit or run up charges on existing accounts. Sometimes, they manage to drain funds from deposit accounts. A spouse of a deceased victim can be open to serious financial repercussions if the scam affects joint accounts.

While this scam appears localized to Indiana, schemes like this surface nationally time and again. Having to deal with an identity crime involving a loved one can present an emotional burden at a time already filled with stress and grief. There are steps you can take to reduce the chance that the identity of a deceased loved one will be stolen.

- Be on the alert for similar scams in your community.
- You should never give out sensitive information over the phone. If you are contacted in such a manner, gather as much information about the caller as you can and contact the local law enforcement authorities.
- Long, loving obituary notices are a respectful remembrance of your loved one. However, they often include so much information that potential thieves have a big head start.
- Take care not to include the age, date of birth or the address of the deceased in any announcements relating to the death or the funeral. These pieces of information make it much easier for the thieves to be successful.

If you are a victim of identity theft, contact your local law enforcement agency as soon as possible. You may also contact the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at (800) 342-8385 or www.tennessee.gov/consumer for information on identity theft prevention.

###

DAVY CROCKETT TOWER, 5TH FLOOR
500 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TN 37243
615.741.2241